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ABSTRACT

The department of English at West Chester University, Pennsylvania provides a laboratory for examining the situation of composition in a department that has documented its dedication to a unified study of English based on attention to reading and writing. The department adopted a "Statement of Coherence" that signals a dialectic: the fact that the department needed such a statement suggests a centrifugal tendency, but the fact that the department made such a statement suggests a willingness to achieve wholeness. The traditional literary faculty continue to command resources that significantly exceed what the compositionists can muster for the tasks of teaching students and enhancing that teaching through research and new hiring. But the real answer to the question of whether multidisciplinarity recognizes composition as an equal participant in the mission of the department comes in "cuentos": in stories, in the day-to-day events of the department and in the way those events are reframed as they are retold. One such story comes from the department's "Outcomes Assessment Retreat." The groups established to draft each subdiscipline's outcomes mirrored the implicit hierarchy of the department, and the attempt to produce mission-reflecting outcomes revealed the ongoing dialectic between the centrifugal and cohering tendencies of the department. Two cliches provide an adequate peroration: talk is cheap, and actions speak louder than words. Appended are the English Department's Statement of Coherence and Mission statement, and the Composition Group's Outcomes for the General Education Composition Program. (RS)

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Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cuentos:

Critical Composition Practice in a Multidisciplinary Department of English

I. Rhetorics

"It's no secret," Kristine Hansen writes, "that some thirty years after a resurgence of scholarly interest in composition and rhetorical studies, the teaching of writing still occupies the lowest rung on the ladder of college English departments" (23). Traditionally, this lowest rung in the academic hierarchy has been assigned to composition on the basis of what Robert Scholes has identified as the "binary opposition" indicated by departments' tendencies to "mark those texts labeled literature as good or important and dismiss those non-literary texts as beneath our notice" (5). But what about the place of composition in a department that covers so many literary and quasi-literary and rhetorical fields that it can only be called multidisciplinary?

One answer comes from Tilly Warnock, who finds departmental coherence in the fact that

> English departments teach reading and writing; all members of the department are engaged in literacy work of various kinds, from functional literacy to highly theoretical literacy work. Despite differences in teaching, research, and service, we are all committed to teaching language and literature as strategies for coping and equipment for living....This representation of what we do is a close approximation to what we do, not individually, but collectively. (147-48)

A rejoinder comes from Gerald Graff, who holds that asserting the common ground of reading and writing ignores the conflicts inherent in differing *ways* of reading and writing. Graff's institutional

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history of English recognizes that "the colonizing of composition" provided size and thus power to the department even as composition was scorned, but made divisions inevitable: "These divisions between scholars and critics and between literature and composition teachers reflected fundamental disagreements over both the proper object of English study--was it language, literature, culture, or rhetoric?--and over the proper methods of such study" (16). Graff argues for a "coherence without disciplinarity" based upon the provocative approach of focusing on the composition-literature status differential itself. Referring to Warnock's position and staking out his own solution, Graff says,

> The assumption that is not challenged...is that composition and literary studies need to find a conceptual common ground to cooperate. It does not occur to us that the very differences between composition and literature, including their differing political status in the university, could become the connecting link. (23-24)

Graff then goes on to suggest that creating a departmental dialogue on the comp-lit status gap, or creating a comp-lit symposium on the secession of composition from English at the University of Texas, would not automatically eliminate inequity between the subdisciplines but might allow for the kind of healthy examination that could help us avoid departmental schisms (25-26).

My own Department of English provides a laboratory for examining the relative worth of claims made by Scholes, Warnock, and Graff. (As I regularly tell my composition students, any worthwhile essay must deal with arguable positions rather than universally-known realities, and thus I need not discuss Hansen's succinct and unassailable statement.) What is the situation of composition in a department that has documented its Warnock-style dedication to a unified study of English based on attention to reading and writing, discourse and culture? Is the Scholes-identified binarism broken down? Does the stated coherence around reading and writing prepare the department for a Graffian examination--and alleviation--of the outsider status of composition?

My department a year ago adopted, after discussion and solemn vote, a "Statement of Coherence." One sign of the multidisciplinary department is that it needs a statement of coherence at all; I imagine that relatively few departments have such a creature. The Statement of Coherence, then, is a rhetorical signal of the state of the department. It signals a dialectic: on one hand, the fact that the

department *needs* such a statement suggests a centrifugal tendency, a state of possible *in*coherence; on the other hand, the fact that the department *makes* such a statement suggests a willingness to achieve wholeness. Discussion of the place of composition (as we'll see in the "Cuentos" part of this essay) reflects this dialectic, operating along a continuum between the centrifugal and unifying positions. This is the Department of English Statement of Coherence (Appendix A):

> While the English Department at WCU comprises various subdivisions--notably, English and American Literature, Composition, Teacher Education, Business and Technical Writing, Comparative Literature Studies, African/African-American Literature, Children's Literature, Linguistics, Journalism, Creative Writing, and Film--it is, nevertheless, integrated around a common goal: that is, teaching students how to become critical and analytical readers of diverse discourses (diverse, for example, in terms of media, occupation, discipline, gender, and ethnicity) and how to become proficient writers and critics who can work within or against the rules and assumptions of those discourses. In short, the Department's subdivisions find their overall coherence in the cultivation of skills required to work competently and critically with society's principal textual meaning systems. (Department of English, "Proceedings" 31)

Similarly, the department's Mission Statement (see Appendix B) represents a dialectic between the department's centrifugal and cohering qualities. The Mission Statement says the department's "common objective is the development of the skills required for productive and critical engagement with literature and other uses of language" (Department of English, "Proceedings" 32), privileging literary study and relegating composition to "other." The same document, nevertheless, concludes that the department "values critical literacy as a resource for democracy, one that invests citizens with the cognitive skills needed to analyze and critique those forms of language which work against the ideals of community, cooperation, and equality" (32).

The rhetoric of these two statements is susceptible to an optimistic reading. The very existence of these statements, some might say, suggests a conscious move away from the "binary opposition" Scholes critiques and the division Graff cites. The rhetoric of the Statement of Coherence suggests a harmonious

equity of subdisciplines in English, a Warnockian belief in reading and writing and citizens' literacy. Perhaps, this statement suggests, my department operates according to a progressive "English Studies" model comparable to the ones at Carnegie Mellon, the University of Pittsburgh, or the State University of New York at Albany, three programs James A. Berlin cites as "committed...to disrupting the old hierarchical binaries of the discipline and reformulating them in the light of postmodern theory" (*Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* 149). That's what the rhetoric of the Statement of Coherence suggests. To borrow a phrase from the title of another work of Berlin's, what is the relationship of rhetoric and reality?

II. Poetics

How do the common-goal-oriented Statement of Coherence and the democratic-literacy-oriented Mission Statement intersect with the binary power relations that obtain in most departments? To play the binary game for a moment, let's choose up teams. One team we'll call the "Rhetorics"--big R--the team name for the composition folks. Another team we'll call the "Poetics"--the traditional literary-study champions. (Any resemblance to the title of the aforementioned Berlin book, *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, is intentional and honorific.)

One way to keep score in the game between the Rhetorics and the Poetics in my department is to watch who wins the prizes. That is, I propose to see whether poetic and rhetoric are considered equal in epistemological value by seeing if the strength of resources devoted to each field is equal. If, in fact, my department's enlightened multidisciplinarity sees a corresponding value in the knowledge-making tasks of composition and the knowledge-making tasks of literary study, comp and lit should offer comparable programs of study, hire comparable numbers of faculty (specialists in each field, or comp-and-lit integrationists), and support comparably-stable and secure faculty complements.

Some history and description may help us to keep track of the players in this game. West Chester University is a state regional comprehensive institution of just under 12,000 students. The Department of English offers courses in all of the disciplines listed in the abovementioned statements, though majors are only in literary (literature and creative writing) and English-education fields. The department offers a small master's program--about 30 degree-bound students, with five of them teaching composition on

assistantships, and of course none teaching introductory lit--in only the literary fields, or for a secondary teaching certificate. There are about 44 tenure-track faculty, of which five are designated for composition; there are five permanent part-timers, and a transient group of as many as 25 adjunct faculty. The tenure-track faculty are unionized, and a union rule dictates that no adjunct may teach more than four consecutive semesters. First-year composition represents a very large proportion of department teaching (and thus funds generated). In Fall 1997, there were approximately 2280 students in first-year composition, 1070 in first-year general-education literature, and 1260 students in everything else--sophomore through senior literature, plus a little journalism, film, tech writing, and creative writing.

To consider just one round of the game, let's look at the question of tenure-track hiring. Tenure-track hiring reliably reflects the relative value of lit and comp because in my department, only tenure-track faculty vote on policy and resource decisions, are respected and rewarded for research in their fields, earn pay increases, and are allowed to remain at the university long enough to influence the institutional culture while they simultaneously adapt their teaching more perfectly for the institution's particular students and strengths. Tenure-track faculty both embody and increase the power and respect of the field they inhabit. This power and respect are useful, some might say necessary, to make arguments heard, to garner resources in the institutional centers of discussion, to muster research, to determine the content and aims of our courses of study. Thus, power and respect can advance the cause of good teaching in the field that possesses such power and respect. Tenure-track faculty, then, are the prizes in this game.

Last year in my department, adjuncts (Temporary Instructors, graduate students, and permanent part-time) taught about 66% of composition sections; adjuncts taught 9% of 100-level general education literature. Putting it another way, tenure-track faculty taught 33% of composition but 91% of 100-level lit. Score: Poetics 1, Rhetorics 0. This year, numbers of temporary instructors rose from 20 a year ago to 25, while tenure-track faculty teaching composition declined in number. Score: Poetics 2, Rhetorics 0. The department (that is, tenure-track faculty only) annually votes on what requests for tenure-track hiring will be made; of five possible fields, literary fields were ranked 1, 2, and 3, with composition ranked fourth, just barely ahead of the very small journalism major field. Score: Poetics 3, Rhetoric 0. The Composition Committee forwarded to the department chair a request that the hiring ballot include a vote on whether

advertisements for tenure-track hiring in all fields might include the qualification of knowledge of composition and the willingness to teach it; the chair refused to allow a vote on the issue, claiming that the Composition Committee was trying to dictate qualifications, in violation of the department constitution. (But why, the Rhetorics asked, is it improper to vote for a secondary field while it is standard practice to vote for the primary field?) Score: Poetics 4, Rhetorics 0. An American Lit professor resigned late this semester; the department immediately took moves to hire two professors in that field, rather than the one it had already planned to hire, thus automatically replacing faculty to continue the imbalance of tenure-track professors in favor of lit rather than comp. Score: Poetics 5, Rhetorics 0. The Poetics got all of the prizes.

The Poetics, then--the traditional literary faculty--continue to command resources that significantly exceed what the Rhetorics, the compositionists, can muster for the tasks of teaching students and enhancing that teaching through research and new hiring. In the game of resource-competition, the ideal statements of harmony and coherence are ignored; binarism and the status-quo hierarchy assure that the Rhetorics lose and the Poetics win.

Graff suggests that starting a dialogue about the inequity between composition and literature can be a way toward coherence without disciplinarity. I have spent the last year engaging in such a dialogue. My colleague Alan France and I have led two spirited and well-attended departmental discussions of the history of the lit-comp rift, of alternatives like the English Studies model, of the damage that comp-lit inequity does to achieving an effective composition program, and of the abuse of adjunct faculty. The dismal results are in the score I described above. Now, I know change doesn't come quickly, and I remain hopeful that some combination of Warnockian unity-around-literacy and Graffian enlightenment-around-dialogue may eventually bring about a golden age. What Graff may not recognize is that in many departments, effective comp-lit dialogue is unlikely, because there is no practical reason for literature faculty to take issues such as the inequity of composition seriously. As Scholes has said recently, literature faculty have no incentive to change the system, and even have good reasons to perpetuate inequity, because "the more economically you can teach those writing courses--which is to say, the more students you can cram into them and the worse you can pay the teachers--the better off the literature faculty is. There's a real conflict of interest" (Schneider A14).

The truth is, I am quite uncomfortable with calling tenure-track faculty prizes, because it denigrates adjunct faculty by comparison. But translating the situation of composition into a game where tenure-track faculty are prizes and adjuncts represent losses provides us a convenient way of testing Warnock's notions. Warnock says that by embracing reading and writing in the coherently multidisciplinary department "we will include everyone in English, including graduate teaching assistants and adjuncts, as united in a common purpose, and we will position ourselves so that we must respect each other and have confidence in what we do" (157) Is this what has happened in my ostensibly reading-and-writing-united department? Instead, composition remains in the situation in which, as Michael Berube has said recently of the reward system at most research universities, "the more contact you have with undergraduate writing, the lower your salary" (B5). Applied to the situation at my regional comprehensive university, the more composition teaching you do, the lower your salary and the less likely you are to have a steady job and a voting citizenship in the academic community.

I am equally uncomfortable with the metaphor of our teaching as a game of opposing teams. For one thing, I think what we do is too important to be trivialized as a game; what we do can make a difference, I believe, in our students' lives, if we help them to make sense of the world and understand the relationship of language and culture and power. More importantly, I want the students, not any subcategory of faculty, to come out winners. And finally, I don't want to operate in a binary game at all. I do not consider it intellectually ethical or epistemologically worthwhile to replace a poetics-privileging hierarchy with a rhetoric-privileging hierarchy.

III. Cuentos

But the real answer to the question of whether multidisciplinarity recognizes composition as an equal participant in the mission of the department comes in cuentos: in stories, in the day-to-day events of the department and in the way those events are reframed as they are retold.

One such story comes from our department's "Outcomes Assessment Retreat" in the spring of 1997. The department chair had been made aware of the existence of structural stresses in the department by the in-house review process, the struggle to come to a Statement of Coherence, the Composition Task

Force Report and the complaints of upstart compositionists. Simultaneously, she had to meet a university-generated requirement for outcomes assessment. Her proposed solution was to plan a Department Retreat (at a local robber baron's estate turned township park, off campus, catered) which would, in her vision, combine the benign harmony of a family reunion with the administration-pleasing productivity of an outcomes-assessment planning session. But every good story presents its protagonists with a problem to be overcome, a quest to be achieved. Would the two intertwined subplots of this story lead to a denouement satisfactory to composition and true to the ideals of a coherently multidisciplinary department?

I was a protagonist in the story--no hero; in the final analysis, I failed. My first mistake was to treat the multidisciplinary ideals of the Statement of Coherence as a serious recognition of equity and common purpose. Because I figured that composition was a labor to be shared by a wide spectrum of the department, I posited that its policies and outcomes should be influenced by a wide spectrum of the department. In the department chair's initial plan, the outcomes for each subdiscipline were to be drafted by a working group of specialists in that subdiscipline. I argued that, on the contrary, if we were going to make faculty of every subdiscipline and rank potentially susceptible to teaching composition as a part of the cheerfully-shouldered common labor of the department, the discussion group for composition outcomes should include faculty from many fields.

I was, unfortunately, successful in this argument. I should have been tipped off to the unwritten rules of the game when I saw the designation of the groups. Roughly mirroring the implicit hierarchy of the department, Group A was the Graduate Program group (there is no graduate degree in composition in my department, only in literature). High in the order of the groups--Group B--was, interestingly, the General Education Literature group, limited to focusing on outcomes for the single 100-level university-wide literature requirement course. About halfway down the list was the "Writing Programs" group, including Journalism, Advanced Writing (business and technical), and Creative Writing, but conspicuously ignoring composition, as if composition isn't writing. At the very bottom of the list, Group H was for Composition. Now, it may be fairly argued that the order of groups doesn't explicitly indicate rank. But what would a semiotician or discourse theorist read in the story?

When Group H was named, it included the Composition Director (me) as group leader. Additional members included the department's softest-spoken compositionist; two Ivy League-pedigreed full professors in literary fields, who hadn't taught the core composition course within memory; and an accomplished poet, who had complained vocally to me about the waste of his time the department had caused when the chair assigned him to teach composition the one and only time in the last several years. Adjunct faculty, who teach 60 to 70% of comp courses and almost nothing else, were of course not even invited to the department retreat. This was a family reunion in which some folks were not considered part of the family; or, as Eileen Schell has noted, the composition-literature relationship is itself a "bad family dynamic" in which composition faculty "are like the wives. They stay home...while the literature faculty reaps the rewards" (Schneider A14).

So how do the discourse-analysis-touting Statement of Coherence and the critique-of-language-touting Mission Statement intersect with the department's potential outcomes? The attempt to produce mission-reflecting outcomes revealed the ongoing dialectic between the centrifugal and cohering tendencies of the department. Group H did produce a final report in which some attention is paid to "critical literacy," "cultural awareness," and other key terms in the department's explicit *raison d'être*. (See Appendix C, "Group H: Outcomes for the General Education Composition Program.") However, the presence of those key terms mainly represents the department chair's dissemination of a rubric in which those words appear, plus the Composition Director's imaginative reconstruction of the group's work in order to comply with the directive while creating a document suggesting the possibility of epistemological equity for composition. Group H had great difficulty reaching agreement, a difficulty that can be attributed to two reasons. First, the non-compositionists in the group did not significantly distinguish among the three composition courses under consideration--a Basic Writing course, an introductory "Effective Writing" course, and an introductory research-writing course--and tended to think of them all as vaguely remedial, as if the very need for any or all of the courses merely indicated the pitiable state of pre-college education. Therefore, much time was spent merely communicating the meaning of the courses (eventually, outcomes were drafted for only one of the three courses). Second, the non-compositionists' favored outcomes "reveal a lowest-common-denominator approach" stemming from "non-composition specialists'

unfamiliarity with significant research in the field," as the report of the retreat summarized (Department of English 25). Three members of the five-member Group H "felt that longer, academic essays are not suitable for Basic Writing, as they take class time that should be given to practice of grammar (in context and out), usage, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics"; this subgroup argued "for the limiting of student essays to a traditional 500-word formula" (Department of English 24). Actually, one member of the subgroup initially argued for limiting basic writing to the creation of sentences and paragraphs, and had to be persuaded to adopt even the longer but formulaic 500-word criterion.

The majority of the consciously-multidisciplinary discussion group was unable or unwilling to see any connection between composition and the critical-literacy, cultural-studies goals that should unite the Department of English. As Sharon Crowley has pointed out, required composition curricula generally "maintain and promulgate a definition and ideology of writing instruction that is quite narrow, configuring it as a series of exercises in formal fluency plus instruction in usage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation" (231). The continuing assumption of that narrow definition among literature faculty who, invested in the binarism Scholes critiques, see composition as a burdensome service provided to the unworthy illiterate, overrides the most sincerely-adopted Statement of Coherence or Mission Statement.

My story should not be interpreted as a jeremiad against English departments, or against folks who teach literature and therefore find themselves accidentally or serendipitously enjoying the last days at the top of a counterproductive hierarchy that may be crumbling but persists. My story should not be interpreted as a jeremiad against my own department. I continue to believe that an explicitly-stated position of multidisciplinarity, coupled with personal collegiality, may represent the beginning--though not the achievement--of an intellectually-rich departmental paradigm wherein composition has an equitable place in the consideration of culture and discourse. For the sake of my students, whose writing courses can provide a consistently challenging educational experience only when that potential equity of multidisciplinarity is made real, I continue to have hope. But as much as it pains a rhetorician to admit it, when it comes to the stories our institutional statements and structures tell, two clichés provide an adequate *peroratio*. Talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words.

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(APPENDIX A)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY
Statement of Coherence

While the English Department at WCU comprises various subdivisions--notably, English and American Literature, Composition, Teacher Education, Business and Technical Writing, Comparative Literature Studies, African/African-American Literature, Children's Literature, Linguistics, Journalism, Creative Writing, and Film--it is, nevertheless, integrated around a common goal: that is, teaching students how to become critical and analytical readers of diverse discourses (diverse, for example, in terms of media, occupation, discipline, gender, and ethnicity) and how to become proficient writers and critics who can work within or against the rules and assumptions of those discourses. In short, the Department's subdivisions find their overall coherence in the cultivation of skills required to work competently and critically with society's principal textual meaning systems.

Approved by English Department faculty March 1997

(APPENDIX B)

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT MISSION STATEMENT

The English Department at West Chester University is committed to the goal of educating its students to the highest levels of critical literacy and cultural awareness. It values, and therefore actively promotes, effective communication and sensitivity to the uses and abuses of language in its diverse cultural forms. Accordingly, its primary focus is on training students to become both critical and insightful readers and proficient writers. The Department, in both its undergraduate and graduate divisions, has the expertise and facilities with which to achieve these goals. It is distinguished by its range of interlinked programs, whose common objective is the development of the skills required for productive and critical engagment with literature and other uses of language. It works to maintain a tradition of personalized faculty-student interaction and expert academic advisement. Above all, the Department is dedicated to quality teaching, that is to say, teaching that reflects innovations in thought and scholarship, that uses current technologies to facilitate learning, and that responds to the cultural diversity of the student body.

The English Department's curricula are oriented towards the career needs of its students. The Bachelor of Arts in Literature and the Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature prepare students not only for graduate studies and law school, but also for careers in the media and other professions that require an advanced level of literacy. The Bachelor of Science in Education in English prepares students to teach in Pennsylvania's secondary schools under an Instruction I Certificate. The Department is organized so as to offer its majors, as well as students based in other disciplines, a solid education in any one or more of the following areas: English and American Literature, Effective Writing, Teacher Education, Business and Technical Writing, Comparative Literature Studies, African/African-American Literature, Children's Literature, Linguistics, Journalism, Creative Writing, and Film. In addition, the Department provides four general education courses for the entire University, as well as service courses for many disciplines across the University.

The English Department at West Chester University pursues the ideal of a socially conscious education. It aims to scrutinize preconceptions about race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. It values critical literacy as a resource for democracy, one that invests citizens with the congitive skills needed to analyze and critique those forms of language which work against the ideals of community, cooperation, and equality.

Approved by the English Department Faculty April 1997

(APPENDIX C)

GROUP H: OUTCOMES FOR THE GENERAL EDUCATION COMPOSITION PROGRAM
ENG. 020, ENG. 120, AND ENG. 121
Group Leader, William Lalicker

Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose	Departmental/Program Intended Outcomes/Objectives	Assessment Criteria and Procedure
Mission Statement (See appendix)		
Goals: (key terms) "Critical literacy" "Cultural Awareness" "Effective communication in its diverse cultural forms" "Socially conscious education" "Cognitive skills" "Service for many disciplines"	**ENG. 020** -Critical reading ability(comprehend thesis and structure) -Ability to summarize------->with a -Ability to narrate---------->coherent -Ability to describe---------->thesis -Ability to demonstrate written organization and structure (paragraph and sentence level as well as essay level) -Ability to make appropriate language choices -Ability to demonstrate grammar and punctuation appropriate to university discourse -Ability to demonstrate not only personal discourse, but academic audience consciousness	**ENG. 020** 1) Essay exam final, in class 2) Portfolio of a precis b audience-conscious essay 1)Scored by rubric --all exams-- 80% of students will score 75+ points 2) Scored by rubric --10% random sample-- 80% of students will score 75+ points

Group H spent the afternoon session attempting to define the three composition courses of the first-year sequence in relation to one another with a view toward drawing clearer boundaries than the department has thus far been able to do. In the course of the discussion, it became clear that there was not clear consensus on Bill Lalicker's view that Basic Writing ought to be viewed as primarily a critical reading and writing course (introduction to and immersion in academic discourse), Effective Writing as primarily an across-the disciplines writing-from-research course. Consensus was achieved, however, on a possible division of emphases between ENG 020 and 120, and on the notion that some additional consistency should be applied to the different sections of ENG 121 (essentially that ENG 121 should not focus on literary research but on research for multiple disciplines). Possible outcomes to be assessed for ENG 020 should include solid paragraph development (for logic and coherence), as well as strong sentences (to eliminate problems of syntax and idiom). Three members of Group H felt that longer, academic essays are not suitable reading material for Basic Writing, as they take class time that should be given to the practice of grammar (in context and out), usage, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics--all areas where basic writers are deficient. The same rationale --time saved and sharper focus, allowing a more detailed look at and more extensive practice of lower-level skills--led to the subgroup's argument for the limiting of student essays to a traditional 500-word formula. Group H briefly considered ENG 120 outcomes, agreeing that critical thinking skills and close attention to logos, ethos, and pathos might be appropriately assessed.

Group H chair Bill Lalicker notes that this discussion is incomplete and, in some ways, unsatisfactory. Group H did identify some real outcomes to be assessed and set in place the possibility of a sequential structure in which each course in the sequence could have discrete traits measured in terms of how they add to the skills acquired in the previous course. Nevertheless, the outcomes championed by some group participants reveal a lowest-common-denominator approach to assessment. This approach probably stems from non-composition specialists' unfamiliarity with significant research in the field. Some members of Group H argued for outcomes assessment in which the relationship of writing to learning and thinking--the social-epistemic nature of composition--is ignored. The discussion, therefore, should be considered incomplete until, perhaps, more sophisticated attention could be paid to the role of essay-level contexts and rhetorical stances for student writing. Even at the most introductory levels of composition, such as ENG 020, research overwhelmingly suggests that attention to rhetorical stance (context and argument) is a means toward the end of more polished sentences, paragraphs, and grammatical elements.

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